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Language and Community-Based Tourism: Use, Needs, Dependency, and Limitations

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Language and tourism are essentially interconnected by the cross-border movement of tourists and the resulting encounters of people who often speak different languages. These relationships, however, have not been explored very much in the context of community-based tourism (CBT), a kind of tourism that has the potential to enhance communities' socioeconomic growth, language skills, and cultural heritage. This study explores local communities' perceived English language needs and challenges for tourism purposes in Thailand's second-tier provinces of Chiang Rai and Buriram. Informed by fieldwork observations, semi-structured, and focus-group interviews, the findings reveal four key issues: i) the limitations of host-guest interaction and communication, ii) dependency on tour guides, iii) communities' current communicative English needs, and iv) language users' sociocultural and linguistic identities. In the cross-cultural tourism encounter, English was needed by the communities despite its limited use by CBT leaders and members. Cultural identities of the communities and individual speakers were constructed by tour guides whose interpretations of cultural meanings could have been lost in translation. Despite the hegemonic *lingua franca* status of English, multilingual competence among CBT professionals should be promoted to facilitate community communication and more independence from external translators and cultural brokers. Driven by Thailand's current economic development model, information and communication technology (ICT) could be used to help meet Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 4 (Quality Education) and 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) by promoting lifelong learning opportunities and socioeconomic development for remote tourism destinations.

Keywords: Community-based Tourism; English as a *lingua franca*; Language Learning Needs; Language Use; Sustainable Development Goals

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INTRODUCTION

Language and tourism have been intricately intertwined and reciprocally underpinned due to globalization and the mobility of tourists, leading to the inadvertent flows of languages and cultures across nations (Thurlow & Jarworski, 2010). Language barriers, as many travelers and hosts in tourism destinations experience, can pose major obstacles to host-guest interactions and

cross-cultural communication (Cohen & Cooper, 1986; Dolezal, 2015; Jhaiyanuntana & Nomnian, 2020). Few studies (Cohen & Cooper, 1986; Hall-Lew & Lew, 2014; Majidi, 2013; Satarat, 2010; Stainton, 2018; Thurlow & Jaworski, 2010), however, focus on the extent to which language plays a role in the tourism industry, particularly with community-based tourism (CBT), which has been promoted in the tourism field since the 1990s. According to Han, Eom, Al-Ansi, Ryu, and Kim (2019), CBT could lead to sustainable tourism in a way that not only realizes socioeconomic benefits, but also increases sustainability for communities at local levels.

Although CBT has been defined in various ways (Aslam, Cooper, Othman, & Lew, 2016; Boonratana, 2010; Dangi & Jamal, 2016), this study adopts the definition provided by the ASEAN Secretariat, which is commonly employed for regional use. CBT in this context is defined as a

tourism activity, community owned and operated, and managed or coordinated at the community level that contributes to the well-being of communities through supporting sustainable livelihoods and protecting valued socio-cultural traditions and natural and cultural heritage resources. (ASEAN Secretariat, 2016, p.2).

CBT in Southeast Asia is promoted for national socioeconomic development and shows potential to enhance the sociocultural values of local communities (Trupp, Dolezal, & Bui, 2020). The principles and practices of CBT are claimed to be an alternative that advocates a more impartial and redistributive approach to tourism, which can reduce socioeconomic inequalities and uphold social justice, the allocation of resources, ownership, and community empowerment (Giampiccoli & Saayman, 2016). Even the Thai government's new economic model called "Thailand 4.0", which aims to develop an innovative and value-based economy for the prosperity, security, and sustainability for the nation, suggests the inclusion of CBT approaches (Charoensit & Emphandhu, 2018). Dodds, Ali, and Galaski (2018), however, claim that there are barriers to successful CBT, including financial viability (i.e., lack of funding and finance skills), marketing (i.e., little direct marketing to foreign visitors), product development (i.e., non market-ready products), capacity building (i.e., lack of access to markets), and land management/governance (i.e., lack of empowerment of local communities).

Recently, tourism researchers have increasingly been addressing the linkages between tourism development and the SDGs, either by focusing on the overall SDG framework (Hall, 2019; Siakwah, Musavengane, & Leonard, 2019), or by studying a specific SDG, such as SDG 1 (No Poverty) (Scheyvens & Hughes, 2019), SDG 5 (Gender Equality) (Alarcón & Cole, 2019), or SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) (Robinson, Martins, Solnet, & Baum, 2019). However, such research is yet to be applied to a Southeast Asian context (Dolezal, Trupp, & Bui, 2020), and has not yet examined the linkages between tourism and language learning, which essentially form part of SDG 4 (Quality Education).

Charoensit and Emphandhu (2018) suggest that CBT knowledge sharing is one of the research gaps in CBT, especially with regard to foreign tourists, who could learn about and appreciate local lifestyles and cultures. However, host-guest interactions and cross-cultural communication in Thailand's tourism encounters are often constrained by language differences. Most visitors to Thailand are not able

to communicate in Thai or the other local languages, and Thailand generally ranks low on existing English proficiency indices (Kaur, Young, & Kirkpatrick, 2016). Dolezal (2011), for instance, points out that language barriers between local community members in Thailand and international tourists are often overcome by tour guides who may simultaneously narrow the communication gap but widen the personal distance between the locals and tourists. On the one hand, language barriers lead to a reliance on a non-local guide or interpreter, who may misrepresent the community or make mistakes in interpretation (Toyota, 1993; Trupp, 2014b). On the other hand, local communities may utilize regular interactions with international tourists as an opportunity to practice and improve their foreign language skills, particularly English (Sakata & Prideaux, 2013; Trupp, 2014a, 2017). Teaching and learning English as a foreign language for tourism purposes not only meets the need for more meaningful communication and shared experiences among guests and their host communities, but also contributes to the dominance of English “in every domain of communication within both local and global contexts” (Stainton, 2018, p.123).

In the Southeast Asian tourism domain, English has been chosen as the working language of the ASEAN community since 2015, according to the ASEAN Charter (Article 34) (ASEAN Secretariat, 2008). Despite and because of its global status, English is often considered a threat to indigenous languages that have been under constant marginalization (Majidi, 2013). The global dominance of English has been examined from different critical perspectives, including Phillipson’s (2013) *linguistic imperialism*, “analyzing how political independence led to a linguistic liberation of Third World countries, and if not, why not” (p.1). Cohen and Cooper (1986) note that language and tourism are reciprocally interrelated in terms of how communication between different linguistic groups and tourists is accommodated and negotiated due to an imbalance in power relations as a result of different sociolinguistic, economic, and educational backgrounds. In Thailand, as well as in other non-English, native-speaking countries across the region, English has been appropriated into the tourism industry. It is the main language in situations of institutionalized tourism, such as promotion and marketing, reservations and bookings (for hotels, restaurants, transport, etc.), and conversations in tourism establishments.

This study has two main objectives. First, it aims to assess English language needs of remote, second-tier village communities involved in CBT, namely Baan Pha-Mee (Chiang Rai province) and Baan Kok Muang (Buriram province) in Thailand. Second, it aims to address and analyze the existing challenges in host-guest communication in these two CBT contexts, where English has retained its hegemonic power despite its limited use in the areas. Findings thus contribute to theoretical underpinnings of English in tourism contexts and align with SDG 4 (Quality Education) and SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), which aim to equip people with technical and vocational skills for employment and entrepreneurship (United Nations, 2019). The article proceeds with a literature review on the topics of language and the host-guest encounter, English as a form of capital, and English learning and the Thai context. After introducing the research sites and the qualitative methodologies, the findings discuss four key issues: i) the limitations of host-guest interaction and communication, ii) dependency on tour guides, iii) communities’ current communicative English needs, and iv) language users’ sociocultural and linguistic identities.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Language and the Host-Guest Encounter

International tourism and host-guest encounters in cross-cultural and cross-language contexts have expanded significantly in recent decades. Following the history of the linguistic landscape and contemporary language use that establishes the relationship between language, tourism, and place, the micro-level of individual language users' interactions between tourists and locals requires various linguistic and non-linguistic resources to meet communicative objectives in situated tourism settings (Hall-Lew & Lew, 2014; Yumatov et al., 2017). Hoffman (1992) notes that the cultural landscape has been hybridized and transformed by English used by tourism workers and on commercial and road signs.

Communication in CBT settings between local communities and foreign tourists requires mutual intelligibility, since both groups have possibly different expectations and needs (Cohen & Cooper, 1986). Hall-Lew and Lew (2014) claim that tourists have certain expectations of the hosts' communicative abilities, including acquiring essential tourism vocabulary providing basic information for tourists' comfort and convenience, whereas the hosts expect the tourists to adapt themselves within the target speech community; and thus, language learning may alleviate linguistic barriers and cultural differences between residents and tourists.

However, much of the host-guest interaction and communication in tourism contexts is mediated by tour guides who, in many cases, also act as cultural intermediaries and translators (Cohen, 2001; Trupp 2014b). They are often not able to accurately explain local culture to international tourists (Theerapappisit, 2012). Tour guides and translators directly construct the image of the locations and local communities they visit, and they convey this to the wider outside world (Toyota, 1993). Their role becomes even more significant in countries like Thailand where the local alphabet used in signage is different from that which international visitors are familiar with (Hall-Lew & Lew, 2014).

The linguistic heritage context addresses the sociolinguistic backgrounds of tourism destinations, illustrating the historical relationships between people and their linguistic landscape (Hall-Lew & Lew, 2014). In the north of Thailand, Thongtong (2016), for instance, claims that both English and Chinese are the key foreign languages used in Thai tourist markets and public spaces due to the influx of Chinese tourists. In Bangkok, however, Sarot and Kraisame (2018) suggest that businesses in the north Nana district use two or more languages, including English and Arabic to communicate with customers from the Middle East. This is done using signs in multiple languages, which stand out from the ubiquitous Thai, and help raise linguistic awareness in trade and tourism. Thongtong (2016) regards tourist sites as part of the linguistic landscape that can be a practical and meaningful educational resource for language teaching and learning. At the macro-level, the linguistic heritage history of a particular tourism location can provide a platform for the contemporary sociolinguistic context that can then address the role and functions of language in the local tourism community (Hall-Lew & Lew, 2014).

English as a Form of Capital

The ability to speak foreign languages is an advantage, especially in the tourism industry where people of different linguistic backgrounds interact. A good command of English plays an important part for delivering quality services in the tourism and hospitality industry (Zahedpisheh, Bakar, Zulqarnain, & Saffari, 2017). This is also evidenced by a growing number of educational and academic resources for learning and teaching English in tourism contexts (see for example, Eghdami, Moinzaheh, & Barati, 2018; Ennis & Petries, 2020).

Language has not only been conceptualized as a medium of communication but also as a form of capital, and thus, power (Bourdieu, 1986). Bourdieu (1991) evaluated the relationship between language and power, and how the former is socially evaluated. In his study on language and symbolic power, Bourdieu demonstrated how the standard Parisian dialect became the dominant and official language in France, which in turn provided the local bourgeoisie a “monopoly of politics, and more generally of communication with the central government and its representatives” (Bourdieu, 1991, p.47). Similarly, in Thailand, central Thai has been enforced as the national language by banning other languages and dialects from the formal education system. More recently, the ability to speak English has become a form of symbolic capital in many Asian countries. Gao (2012) shows how English skills in contemporary China have become a social stratifier, which is closely linked to prestige and social and occupational upward mobility. Drawing upon Mietzner and Storch (2019), language use in the tourism industry not only reflects socioeconomic status, but also demonstrates social injustice and educational inequity in particular tourism-oriented communities. In Myanmar, for example, English remains a barrier to CBT, even though English translators are available to facilitate communication between guests and hosts (Lusby & Eow, 2015).

English Learning and the Thai Context

English has been a major challenge for Thai businesspeople lacking language proficiency for international communication, especially since English is considered one of the foreign languages commonly used in education rather than work settings (Inpeng & Nomnian, 2020; Phumpho & Nomnian, 2019). However, in 2015 English became the official working language of ASEAN. This decision reflects increasing economic and political integration in the region and also pushes Thai people’s need to be equipped with English skills to remain competitive in the regional and international labor market. The National Curriculum of Thailand includes English as a compulsory subject for all young language learners at kindergarten and primary levels in order for them to acquire the language as early as possible (Nomnian, 2013). English language teaching and learning in Thailand can be quite demanding due to strong pressure from socioeconomic, cultural, and political sources in government and at school, as well as from parents and communities (Nomnian & Thawornpat, 2015). Thai students are expected to attain English language proficiency suitable and applicable for communicative functions at national and international levels (Nomnian & Arphattananon, 2018a, 2018b).

In English language education, Tourism English is considered as one branch of 'English for specific purposes' (ESP). Strevens (1988) states that ESP is designed to meet learners' specific needs based on the skills required for the activities and functions for which the language is to serve. These days, however, English has become a *lingua franca* – a language used by speakers who do not share a common first language – and is used to achieve mutual intelligibility between interlocutors (Nomnian, 2018a). To facilitate this, Thai speakers of English often employ additional pragmatic communicative strategies, including simplifying lexical choices or sentences, repetition, and non-verbal communication (Inkaew, 2018; Nomnian, 2018b; Suebwongsuwan & Nomnian, 2020).

Despite the growing demand for English for tourism purposes, it has also been positioned as a threat endangering local knowledge and practices. Perceptions vary depending on the extent to which language users within particular communities value, need, and have specific expectations of it (Majidi, 2013). Host languages, on the other hand, may be useful as heritage resources for tourism purposes (Hall-Lew & Lew, 2014). Inphoo and Nomnian (2019) suggest that the integration into English language classroom activities of historical background information about sociocultural environments can help language learners appreciate their local community, practices, wisdom, heritage, and traditions, which will stimulate communication events with foreign tourists and visitors. As far as this study is concerned, although communities' need of English and language learning materials are its main focus, it is important to note that the indigenous languages and local cultures of the two case study areas in question (Chiang Rai and Buriram) are taken into special consideration. Their specific heritage resources and local knowledge are an important part of the CBT experience.

In Thailand, English for CBT has referenced possibilities that have become important and dynamic areas of English for tourism. Prachanant (2012), for instance, suggests that although the key main tourism English functions needed by Thai tourism employees were giving information, providing services, and offering help, many employees experienced challenges understanding foreigners' accents, certain words and expressions, vocabulary, and syntactic structure. Nitikasetsoontorn (2015) suggests that CBT enterprises and members should be trained in English communication so as to engage in capacity building for language proficiency and the skills necessary to encourage sustainable development. Drawing upon focus-group interviews exploring commercial raft entrepreneurs' English language needs, Nomnian (2014a, 2014b), has developed a handbook comprising a transliteration of English/Thai expressions commonly used in Kanchanaburi and an English handbook of tourism English detailing tourist information, directions, and modes of transport together with communicative functions such as giving directions and describing tourist attractions in the province.

This study thus derives its conceptual foundations from these main sources: (i) language and the host-guest encounter, (ii) English as a form of capital, and (iii) English learning and the Thai context, which underpin an analysis of targeted research sites with regard to their CBT and language use, needs, dependency, and limitations.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Sites

Employing purposive sampling, this study was undertaken in two villages in two different regions in Thailand: North and Northeast, namely the villages of Baan Pha-Mee and Baan Kok Muang respectively. According to Ruiz-Ballesteros (2017), a multiple case studies approach to CBT research offers a better understanding of internal diversity and external factors shaping the particular tourism experiences, activities, and contexts being investigated and compared. These sites are second-tier tourist attractions that the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) promotes as part of its “Amazing Thailand Go Local” campaign aimed at better balancing the distribution of tourist arrivals between urban and rural areas (TAT News, 2018). Such community-involved tourism projects are further promoted by commercial airlines like Air Asia, whose flight network includes such second-tier destinations (Citrinot, 2017). In the following, the two distinct destinations and research sites are further described.

Baan Pha-Mee (Northern Thailand)

Baan Pha-Mee, meaning “Bear Mountain”, is situated in Mae Sai district, Chiang Rai province in Northern Thailand, bordering Myanmar and Lao PDR. The village is home to the indigenous¹ Akha community. Speaking the Akha language of the Southern Lolo branch of the Tibeto-Burman language family, the approximately 2.5 million Akha people have settled throughout the southern part of Xishuangbanna, Yunnan province, China, northeastern Myanmar, northern Thailand, and Lao PDR (Boonyasarnai, 2017, p.38). Historically, the Akha language was a predominantly spoken language, since no script existed until Christian missionaries developed a Roman-based writing system for it (Boonyasarnai, 2010). However, Alting von Geusau (2000) argues that oral Akha histories indicate that Akha groups once possessed a script that was gradually abandoned. More recently, a common Akha orthography system has been developed by Akha native speakers across highland Southeast Asia (Boonyasarnai, 2010), yet Akha remains a rather marginalized language within the Thai context.

According to Sujachaya and Sitisarn (2005), Akha culture and traditions are well-preserved due to the rather remote locations of some of their villages and a strong engagement with *Akhazhang*, the Akha way of life (Alting von Geusau, 2000). Some of the Akha cultural features and characteristics have been commodified for ethnic tourism representing the exotic other, and meeting tourists’ demand for staged authenticity (Trupp, 2014a; Trupp, 2015). Over the last five decades, Thailand’s highland areas and populations, such as the Akha, have experienced manifold socio-economic and cultural transformation processes, including assimilation policies implemented by the Thai state, loss of land and forest rights, improvements in road and communication infrastructures, market integration, religious change, tourism, and urban-directed migration (McCaskill, Leepreecha, & Shaoying, 2008; Tooker,

1 Within Thailand, a “deterritorialisation of the ethnoscape” has taken place leading to a stronger identification with the concept of ‘indigenous people’ rather than previously used terms such as ‘tribal people,’ ‘hill tribes,’ and ‘ethnic minorities’ (Leepreecha, 2019, p. 32).

2004; Toyota, 1998; Trupp, 2017). Many of these sociocultural and economic changes have been driven by external institutions and initiatives such as various ministries, the Royal Highland Development Projects, international organizations, religious institutions, and non-governmental organizations (Buadaeng & Boonyasaranai, 2008; Gillogly, 2004). Thus, most of Thailand's highland groups have experience in coping with change in accordance with international and national development programs. Theerapappisit (2012), however, suggests that local ethnic groups still need skills training in hospitality, communication, and management in order to earn more income and promote social equity.

In Baan Pha-Mee, fruits such as oranges and lychees, as well as the internationally acclaimed Doi Pha-Mee coffee harvested and sold by villagers, play an important economic role. Coffee tourism has increasingly become a thriving industry that attracts Thai and international tourists who are interested in not only acquiring coffee-related knowledge from farming to brewing, but also learning about local ethnic cultures and traditions by virtue of English-speaking local tourist guides (Smith, Suthitakon, Gulthawatvichai, & Karnjanakit, 2019). Coffee shops, homestays, Akha restaurants, and a giant Akha swing are frequently visited by tourists. Recently, the community became famous after the world-renowned cave rescue of the 13 boys, known as “The Wild Boars”, took place. Despite its remote location, the community receives mobile phone signals, has electricity, and provides accommodation for tourists. Recent studies (e.g., Pudwong & Monpanthong, 2019; Rattanasawangsawang, 2018) suggest that Chiang Rai has extended its business and tourism networks along the North South Economic Corridor leading to increased trade and leisure-based mobility. In 2018, Chiang Rai Province received three million domestic and 600,000 international visitors (TAT, 2020).

Baan Kok Muang (North-eastern Thailand)

The second village, Baan Kok Muang, is located near Muang Tam Sanctuary, which is the site of a historical city of the former Khmer Empire in Prakhon Chai District, Buriram province. Buriram is located in the northeast of Thailand, bordered by Cambodia to its South. The village of Baan Kok Muang is situated near Muang Tam Sanctuary, a 1,400-year-old Khmer temple, so historical and cultural sites make it a highly recommended destination for educational tours (Khan & Hassan, 2016). Most villagers are engaged in rice farming, and arts and crafts. Reed mats and woven silk are locally hand-made products, and craftsmanship is enjoyed by tourists who wish to try making their own personal souvenirs as part of a workshop. Besides the tangible heritage, intangible cultural practices and beliefs represent the community's identity. According to Moolsin and Sripirom (2019), *Baisrisukwan* – the reproduction of cultural capital and ritual ceremony – exhibits the local hospitality that warmly welcomes tourists to the community with blessings from the elderly members. E-sarn language is commonly spoken by villagers in this northeastern region of Thailand, and different dialects of this region are more closely related to the Lao and Khmer languages than to Central Thai (Premsrirat & Hirsh, 2018). Whether to regard Thai, Lao, and E-sarn as distinct languages or rather as dialects is debated among linguists (see for example Enfield, 2002).

The businesses of local entrepreneurs are related to the production and/or sales of herbs, silk cloth, reed mats, and the provision of homestay accommodation. The One Tambon One Product (OTOP) Center – an initiative promoting locally made products – is also famous among travelers who wish to purchase locally-produced handicrafts and souvenirs. There are a number of natural and cultural activities for tourists, including bicycle tours around the village, a visit to Muang Tam Sanctuary and the nearby Barai Reservoir, merit-making by offering alms to monks, and experiencing local meals at a homestay. Tourists can have a hands-on experience learning how to make handicrafts from reeds, weave on handlooms, or dye clothes with fermented mud. Recently, Buriram has positioned itself as the province of sport tourism along with its historical and sociocultural attractions (Leruksa, Chaigasem, & Suephakdee, 2019; Watjanasontorn, Viriyasuebphong, & Voraseyanont, 2019). Despite these concerted efforts, the province receives relatively little tourist attention, with just 2.1 million domestic and 73,000 international visitors annually (TAT, 2020).

Data Collection and Analysis

To explore these two communities' needs for English language learning, a qualitative research approach was employed, including observations, semi-structured interviews, and focus groups comprising stakeholders such as community leaders, villagers, and local entrepreneurs. Accompanied by a local gatekeeper, who was an entrepreneur or CBT project member at each site, we (the third, fourth, and fifth authors of this paper) introduced ourselves to the head of the village and relevant stakeholders, and shared with them the objectives of our study. They welcomed the project, which they considered important for stimulating the community's use of English in a tourism context. At least five visits were made in each village, for a few days each time. The participants' names were anonymized, and the research ethics of this study were approved by the Institute of Population and Social Research, Mahidol University.

Participatory observations were conducted by engaging in community activities such as cooking, cycling, and making handicrafts, which enabled us to understand and familiarize ourselves better with community members and the tourism-related activities. We observed locals doing their daily chores at the homestay and in their neighborhood, and visited local markets, OTOP centers, coffee shops, and restaurants. Through field notes, we documented villagers' routines and communications with tourists. Wijngaarden (2017) claims that qualitative researchers in tourism studies normally conduct fieldwork among hosts, guests, and the illiterate so as to gain insights into the perspectives, attitudes, and ways of life of those living in the vicinity of tourist sites.

In total, 29 people from two communities participated in the semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions. At Baan Pha-Mee, Chiang Rai province, 15 villagers participated in total, six of whom were micro-entrepreneurs working as baristas and homestay owners, and the remaining nine were villagers with different roles in the CBT project. At Baan Kok Muang, Buriram province, 14 participants formed part of the study, including the district leader, community leader, OTOP keepers, entrepreneurs, and villagers. Semi-structured interviews were conducted

with entrepreneurs and community leaders who were instrumental in CBT activities. Focus-group discussions were undertaken with villagers as this method facilitated an open forum for exchange, argument, clarification, and the questioning of viewpoints and their underlying reasons or explanations in a safe and familiar environment. The interview questions covered the following broad topics: socioeconomic background of interviewees, tourism and CBT-related product and activities, issues and challenges in tourism, communication with international tourists, language use with international tourists, perceived needs of English skills, role of CBT in enhancing English language skills, and existing and required English language-learning support and materials.

The semi-structured, and focus group interviews were conducted in Thai language at the participants' homes or at local community centers, which lasted approximately 30 to 45 minutes, and were recorded using a digital voice recorder. Next, the interviews were transcribed verbatim and translated into English, and then cross-validated by another researcher for accuracy. The confirmed transcripts were analyzed using thematic analysis, and based on the conceptual framework, key themes in this study were identified. According to Walters (2016), thematic analysis is an appropriate tool for analyzing identified themes that can reveal interpreted cultural meanings, which become primary issues for the findings and discussion in tourism research.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Limitations of Host-Guest Interaction and Communication

The two communities have different linguistic contexts. The first one is Akha, deriving from the Tibeto-Burmese language family (Boonyasaranai, 2010), at the Akha village of Baan Pha-Mee. The second is E-sarn (also referred to as North-eastern Thai), as spoken by villagers at Baan Kok Muang, being part of the Tai-Kadai language group (Premsrirat & Hirsh, 2018). Indigenous languages in Thailand are generally marginalized due to the Thai state's long-established assimilation policies (Winichakul, 1994) resulting in their limited use in broader contexts (Majidi, 2013). For most villagers in Pha-Mee, Akha is their first language (spoken at home, with family and friends) and Thai is their second language, spoken in schools, for public affairs, and outside the village.

From the fieldwork observation and interviews, the majority of villagers of both communities were in their 50s or older, with a basic, primary education. This demographic structure is characteristic of the aging population and a result of the urban-directed migration of the younger generation in contemporary Thai society (Rigg, 2019). Communicative English courses were introduced in primary education as part of the National Curriculum 2008, and thus not mandatory for the older generation when they were at school. As a result, their English proficiency was relatively limited (Hayes, 2010; Kaur et al., 2016; Nomnian, 2013). Although community schools should have taught English as a subject, this was not the case in Baan Pha-Mee due to the lack of competent teachers. Some villagers then decided to send their children to learn English in provincial schools and universities in order for them to become proficient in English, and these village children later became CBT coordinators who

could use Thai, Akha, and English. Community leaders and coffee shop owners educated in provincial schools were able to use basic English.

Based on the observation data from both communities, foreign tourists could find communication with the local community members challenging, so tour guides or interpreters were needed to facilitate communication between foreign tourists and local hosts. At both communities, tour groups and solo travelers normally came for a day visit or overnight stay to taste the local cuisine and experience the cultural attractions and activities. However, individual foreign visitors appeared more eager to explore local culture and traditions like silk fabric production than tourists visiting as part of a tour group. Tourists tended to use short English expressions for day-to-day functional purposes, such as checking in and out of accommodations, asking for directions, and ordering food. Villagers would reply in single words or short phrases, as well as gestures and non-verbal cues such as smiling and head nodding. Some villagers responsible for local tourism in both communities also learned English through a language training program offered by flight attendant volunteers, but this was not regular as it depended on availability.

Foreign tourists visited either as independent travelers or part of a tour group. The former often experienced communication difficulties, whereas those in groups were usually accompanied by Thai-English speaking tour guides who facilitated exchanges by serving as interpreters between visitors and locals. This is illustrated in the interview extract below:

Tourists often ask me how silk worms are born, become pupas, and then create silk. I can't explain it to them so I show pictures. If there is a tour guide, the community doesn't have difficulties. I would like to have materials on silk making. (villager, focus group interview, Baan Kok Muang)

As indicated in the quote above, the interviewed villager tried to provide information on silk making, but he was not able to do so; thus, pictures of the silk making process were helpful. He also preferred tour guides to be available to ease communication. Similarly, another community leader wanted to learn basic English to be able to communicate with foreign tourists, explaining:

I need basic communicative English because our community normally has annual festivals. I have opportunities to meet a lot of tourists, but I can't take care of them. I can just greet them with a few simple expressions. I don't have the functional language for selling community products. (villager of community learning center for dyed clothes, focus group interview, Baan Kok Muang)

As the community leader was in his 50s, his need for basic communicative English suggests that he learned little English at school. This is unsurprising since the national curriculum of the past did not oblige pupils to start learning at kindergarten, and time spent on learning languages was far less than required. Likewise, entrepreneurs at Baan Pha-Mee encountered similar challenges in terms of inadequate English skills: "My English foundation is not good, so I have to pay attention and listen carefully to tourists in order to understand their needs accordingly" (entrepreneur,

semi-structured interview, Baan Pha-Mee). Similarly, a restaurant owner stated: “I would just like to learn to say simple words, not whole sentences, such as toilet, left, right” (restaurant owner, semi-structured interview, Baan Pha-Mee).

Many of the interviewed villagers involved in tourism lack even basic English skills. At the same time, it is evident that linguistic assets in these two communities were not fully recognized and valued, because Akha and E-sarn languages are not utilized in tourism contexts. While E-sarn language is linked to Central Thai and understood at least partly by many Thai domestic tourists, Akha derives from a different language family and is thus not understood at all by the vast majority of Thai visitors. These heritage languages could not be utilized to generate income for the communities, while English could. English can thus be regarded as a language that dominates other minority ones (Majidi, 2013). Findings show that most research participants are under-trained and ill-equipped with the English language skills they needed. These communication challenges may reflect the communities’ deep-rooted attitudes toward heritage languages and poor English language education, a point that concurs with Mietzner and Storch’s (2019) observation of social injustice and educational inequity in certain tourism contexts. Boonyasaranai (2017) suggests that minority and indigenous languages can be preserved and maintained with the involvement of local educational institutes that recognize and can address these linguistic issues effectively and sustainably via research and development projects.

Dependency on Tour Guides

Tour guides play a crucial role in the two CBT villages under study since they are the main communicators, translators, and facilitators for host-guest interactions that require verbal and cross-cultural communication between members of the local communities and tourists. Educated in English, equipped with regional knowledge about Thailand and tourism studies, the tour guides accompanying international tourists to the two villages are usually not locals in the sense that they were not from either village and worked for travel agencies based in Bangkok or the provincial capital cities.

The main communication between local community members and foreign tourists is facilitated by external guides (i.e., from outside the villages) who do not speak the local languages. However, due to their frequent visits, the guides could speak and understand some frequently-used local language terms, even though their communication mainly switched between English and Thai. The main topics translated by the tour guides relate to the villagers’ ways of life, occupations, handicrafts, and souvenirs. While most guides leading the tours in Northeastern Thailand can communicate in E-sarn language, guides for Northern Thailand hardly understand Akha language. Tour guides would inform the CBT leaders of their itinerary a few days before their visits, including details on the tourists’ nationalities, the number of tourists, types of accommodations (normally homestays), local transports, special diet requirements, activities, and places to visit, to ensure everything was precisely arranged and services were of a professional quality. CBT members had to inform villagers to prepare to meet the expectations of the tour companies whose promotions guaranteed customer satisfaction.

At Baan Pha-Mee, for instance, the coffee shop owner, who was Akha, was not only an entrepreneur, but also a community leader and CBT coordinator who often mediated contacts between tour guides and the locals by code-switching between Thai and the English he had learned at a local university. He thus took on the role of a language broker, as explained below:

I can speak three languages: Akha, Thai, and English. I learned to speak Thai and took an English program at a local university. After graduation, I came back to the community to open a coffee shop that was considered as a CBT center to help tourists with key information such as homestays and tourist attractions. (coffee shop owner, semi-structured interview, Baan Pha-Mee)

A lot of foreign tourists always ask me about my coffee. I often tell them how the coffee is made here in our village and every coffee shop is also different in terms of the taste and environment. My shop is like a one-stop service for foreign tourists as I can give them basic tourist information in English. (coffee shop owner, semi-structured interview, Baan Pha-Mee)

Equipped with three languages, the multilingual coffee owner could switch between Akha, the villagers' first language, and Thai for the benefit of the tour guides, who would later relay the information to the tourists in English. Being able to communicate in English put him in a privileged and rather unique position within the village, since most other community members lacked these language skills and so had little opportunity to communicate their ideas and sell their products directly to international visitors.

Communities' Current Communicative English Needs

The communities' current communicative English needs include speaking and listening skills that are necessary and relevant to tourism communication between the Thai hosts and international visitors since, as a *lingua franca*, English is essential for exchanges of information in various situations such as at the coffee shop, homestays, restaurants, and community learning centers. English is a form of linguistic capital for local CBT enterprises that can present products that reflect the community's identity (Hall-Lew & Lew, 2014). In such contexts, villagers also wish to share local knowledge as expressed in the quote below.

I would like to present and demonstrate the community identity of local herbs in the form of welcome drinks such as butterfly pea drink with lime. I want to explain to tourists how it's made and its medicinal benefits. (villager of community learning center for herbal products, focus group interview, Baan Kok Muang)

At Baan Pha-Mee community, the main enterprises were the coffee shop, homestays, and restaurants. All these businesses include services that were necessary for tourists. Therefore, functional English focused on giving and asking for directions

to tourist attractions, introducing local food, recommending accommodation, and local shops, as well as sharing community history.

I need to develop my speaking skills the most because I have to provide information to tourists regarding tourist attractions, activities, restaurants, accommodations, directions, and community history. (coffee shop owner, semi-structured interview, Baan Pha-Mee)

Community members in Baan Pha-Mee and Baan Kok Muang needed English speaking and listening skills, starting with practical vocabulary and simple expressions. Moreover, those who speak some English often find it difficult to understand the different English accents of visitors, as experienced by one of the business owners: “Listening is as important as speaking. Tourists have different accents in English. If I can’t recognize these varieties, miscommunication may happen” (homestay owner, semi-structured interview, Baan Pha-Mee).

These communities’ need for English supports Inkaew’s (2018) study that highlights how Thai tourism personnel not only lacked confidence, but also had limited access to terminology, lexical choices, and grammar, and were also unfamiliar with different English accents – all of which impede successful communication. To make communication with foreigners easier, most entrepreneurs and villagers at Baan Pha-Mee and Baan Kok Muang preferred to use a bilingual English-Thai photo book, brochure, or vinyl poster that could provide and illustrate essential community information via pictures, such as of tourist attractions, ways of life, food, and accommodations. Some of them expressed their preferences as follows: “I would like to learn vocabulary or short conversations in Thai and English” (restaurant owner, semi-structured interview, Baan Pha-Mee); also a villager from Baan Kok Muang stated: “I would like to have a Thai-English photo book with a listening CD for illiterate people” (villager of community learning center for reed mats, focus group interview, Baan Kok Muang). Interestingly, villagers stated a preference for printed materials and CDs for learning English as a foreign language. Smart phones, mobile applications, and internet access is generally widespread in Thailand, but most interviewees preferred traditional learning materials to modern devices, due to the unstable and slow internet speeds available to them.

Language Users’ Sociocultural and Linguistic Identities

At the micro-level, with regard to the individual language use in CBT, most participants in the communities were eager and hospitable to help and welcome foreign tourists despite the fact that they found English communication challenging. Community members’ identity construction as good hosts involves effective intercultural communication using both verbal and non-verbal cues.

I want to use English to welcome tourists. Sign language is not enough to communicate with them. In certain situations, I would like to exchange cultural information with them as well. I want the tourists to feel at home staying in our community. (villager, focus group interview, Baan Kok Muang)

The community leader and interviewed villagers in Ban Kok Muang stated that they would like to create a “home away from home” atmosphere for foreign tourists. Coffee shop and restaurant owners at Baan Pha-Mee wanted to be able to explain how their raw materials were harvested and prepared for their foreign customers.

I would like to learn vocabulary about the coffee shop such as types of coffee and explain briefly about coffee harvesting and coffee making because tourists normally ask me about these. (coffee shop owner, semi-structured interview, Baan Pha-Mee)

The photo book should have vocabulary concerning food such as what it's made from and ingredients, especially local cuisine. Nowadays, I can't explain to tourists about our local food, so they usually only order regular Thai dishes. (restaurant owner, semi-structured interview, Baan Pha-Mee)

Baan Kok Muang community learning centers sell local silk clothes and herbal products, but community leaders would go further and share their ways of life with tourists for value-added appreciation. Villagers might find the process of silk making and medicinal benefits of herbal products difficult to explain:

Our herbal products are made from different ingredients. I want to learn simple vocabulary related to all the herbs and their health benefits. Although tourists are interested in our products, they don't buy them because they don't know how to use them. (villager of community learning center for herbal products, focus group interview, Baan Kok Muang)

The interview extracts above demonstrate that the participants in these two communities not only saw themselves as community members, but also community ambassadors who wished to share local products, cultural assets, and traditional knowledge with the tourists. Generally, local villagers are keen to see foreign tourists visiting their centers or businesses, so that they could give first-hand, authentic and non-distorted information, knowing it would be appreciated. However, most of them were not well-equipped with English. Traditional wisdom and culture, according to Inphoo and Nomnian (2019), are added value to local CBT products. Local community members' concerns over their ineffective communicative English rested mostly on their insufficient vocabulary, inadequate grammar knowledge, and inability to understand different accents in English, which led them to a lack of confidence in English communication (Inkaew, 2018). Tour guides as mediums for conveying community information may help overcome this issue (Dolezal, 2011), but at the risk of diminishing local sociolinguistic and identities and sense of community ownership.

The abilities to communicate and negotiate in English represent – and can be transformed into – different forms of capital (Bourdieu, 1986), since these bring about economic advantages for running small businesses and simultaneously allow villagers to gain greater control over their cultural representation. Personal identities as community members were not recognized, as villagers were unable to effectively express themselves in English; thus, many of them voiced the need for Thai-English bilingual

photo books with short English phrases and tourism terminology to promote better mutual intelligibility. Multilingual competence among tourism professionals, however, should be promoted for CBT, as it facilitates communication events among community members and outsiders.

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION

Practical Implications

Drawing upon the results that highlight linguistic gaps between local languages and global communication, communities' current communicative English needs, and language users' identities, this study has implications for SDGs 4 (Quality Education) and 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth). Local CBT enterprises and community members in second-tier tourism destinations should be upskilled, or taught with new skills, for English and other key business functions to better reflect the concept of life-long learning (Kontogeorgopoulos, Churyen, & Duangsaeng, 2014; Nitikasetsoontorn, 2015; Prachanant, 2012). Similar to the issue of language learning materials addressed by Nomnian (2014a, 2014b), English can be used to display the communities' sociocultural identities through bilingual Thai-English photo books, brochures, or vinyl posters that present the community in pictures with brief supporting information that foreign tourists can easily understand.

The integration of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) can be implemented in order to strengthen the economies of local communities and promote equitable high-quality education for them. Charoensit and Emphandhu (2018) suggest that CBT knowledge regarding local lifestyles and cultures should be shared with foreign tourists by means of social media technology. Thailand 4.0 will potentially enable the Tourism Authority of Thailand to employ more reliable ICT and digital infrastructure to promote sustainable tourism growth and competitiveness in Thai tourism (Jones & Pimdee, 2017). Strategies should be devised to entice and direct foreign tourists towards visiting lesser-known tourism destinations that involve local communities in Thailand. This will require a comprehensive and robust tourism information database that is easily accessible to tourists, before and during the trip, and a higher profile for local tourism enterprises in retail, restaurants, entertainment, and tours, which currently have a low online presence that is also only available in Thai (Roland Berger, 2017).

According to Adipat, Phongwitthayanukit, Siributr, Phetnil, and Sudkangwan (2019), the "Village Broadband Internet Project" (*Net Pracharat*) is a recent flagship digital infrastructure development project of Thailand that is expanding high-speed internet network to all villages in the country. Local people living in remote areas will soon be able to access useful information and services, thereby boosting employment, income, and business opportunities in local communities (Adipat et al., 2019). To develop the sustainability of CBT, it is, therefore, important for the communities to be equipped with digital infrastructure including ICT hardware and software and the necessary training for ICT and social media application. If this is successfully implemented, developed, and maintained, the communicative gap between the locals and foreign tourists can be narrowed.

Conclusion

This study explored the challenges that confront two remote communities in Thailand's second-tier destinations, specifically in relation to their English needs for CBT. The findings show that the communities' linguistic heritage was neglected by all stakeholders in the CBT context. Although the participants from Baan Pha-Mee in Chiang Rai and Baan Kok Muang in Buriram were native speakers of their indigenous languages (i.e., Akha, and E-sarn, respectively), they did not utilize them with foreign tourists at all. Instead, English served as a communication medium and as a *lingua franca* in CBT. Since most of the village community members do not speak English or the language of international visitors, external stakeholders such as urban-based tour guides and cultural brokers were the ones who acted as liaisons and translators on behalf of the communities. Tourists perceived the community members' linguistic and sociocultural identities through the eyes of the tour guides, who could have misinterpreted aspects and delivered inaccurate interpretations. Individual tourists at both villages showed greater interest in engaging with local community members, but this was limited as they usually visited the village without the services of a guide to facilitate communication and translation. While it is possible to create meaning and establish a relationship in a tourism encounter without a common linguistic foundation (Dolezal, 2015), the lack of 'direct' self-expression and representation perpetuates unequal power relations in Thai tourism.

The findings show that English is not only a means of international communication, but it also represents a source of power through which competent language users such as tour guides, interpreters, and translators have become important representatives and actors who are valued by other CBT participants, whose lack of English capital denies them such influence. Communicating in English thus enhances economic, social, and symbolic capital. As Bourdieu's (1991) concepts set out, language users employ various accumulated sociolinguistic resources to serve and meet their needs within particular, situated contexts underpinned by their intricate socioeconomic, political, and cultural status. Although CBT communities need to value their own local languages, they must also negotiate their sociolinguistic identities with English to suit the demands of both society and the market in so far as they pertain to the tourism industry. Considering the current COVID-19 global health crisis, the future of tourism might even lead to an increased CBT demand from domestic tourists, which would potentially demand the use of more local languages again.

To meet SDGs 4 and 8, the development of communicative English skills and ICT initiatives offer positive opportunities for lesser-known tourism attractions and remote communities in second-tier provinces in Thailand by not only promoting their socioeconomic status, but also sharing linguistic and cultural values with visitors, particularly foreign tourists. Unlike digitalized urban areas, these local communities lack the ICT infrastructure and digital networks that allow them to gain visibility and accessibility for international visitors. The current policy of Thailand 4.0 should introduce measures to improve internet access and the digitalization of tourism that will buttress CBT and the competitiveness of local businesses.



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